

# Community-led stabilisation in Somalia

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**Non-state armed groups are often considered to lack legitimacy as potential counterparts in building security institutions but when they are in fact in control, this point of view has to be reviewed.**

Somalia has for many years been known as the classic example of a failed state and illustrates clearly how difficult it can be to restore state institutions after their total collapse. Prolonged civil war, famine and poverty have caused a humanitarian crisis with large flows of IDPs and an estimated 3.2 million people in need of humanitarian assistance.<sup>1</sup> Yet while increasing numbers of the population are in urgent need of assistance, access by international agencies to provide relief has become more difficult as a result of pressure from non-state armed groups (NSAGs).

Since the fall of Siad Barre's regime in 1991 various self-appointed administrations have attempted to seize power – and declare autonomy – in different parts of the country. Most well known, though not internationally recognised, is Somaliland to the northwest. As humanitarian space has been shrinking in south-central Somalia, agencies have reorganised their operations to run from the relatively stable areas of Somaliland and, to some extent, Puntland in the north. Yet south-central Somalia remains the region where most of the IDPs and population in acute need are situated and, while the difficulties for humanitarian agencies in negotiating access with NSAGs in the capital city Mogadishu are well known, it is not representative for all of south-central Somalia.

Where NSAGs form local administrations, they become one

of the duty bearers towards the population, including IDPs. And when these administrations are viewed as legitimate among the population, they become important potential partners. In the town of South Galkayo, some 450 km north of Mogadishu, an NSAG called Ahlu-Sunna Wal-Jamaa is in control. Here, in contrast to its experience of trying to facilitate



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in order to create an environment where development can take place. Experience from working in South Galkayo supports the argument that the approach to stabilisation in Somalia needs to explore community-driven processes rather than large-scale and highly politicised stabilisation efforts that have so far proven counter-productive. Building safety at the community level needs to follow humanitarian principles: placing the need of the population at the centre, while not promoting a political agenda. This may even

mean engaging with NSAGs in cases where they have some legitimacy within the population and prove willing to adhere to international standards of humanitarian law.

South Galkayo is the capital of Galmudug State, a self-declared administration founded by clan elders and the NSAG Ahlu-Sunna Wal-Jamaa following the defeat of the Mogadishu warlords in 2006.

safe return for IDPs to Mogadishu, the Danish Demining Group (DDG) has had a positive experience not only of obtaining access but also of engaging in partnership with both the communities and the self-appointed administration.

## A pragmatic approach

Engaging with NSAGs in building institutions to ensure civilian security can be controversial but can also be necessary in cases like Somalia where no central state power exists or is likely to do so in the near future. The prolonged civil war and high levels of insecurity in Somalia have created an urgent need for initiatives to reduce armed violence

The town of Galkayo is situated on the border of Puntland and south-central Somalia and is split north and south under the Puntland and Galmudug State administrations respectively. Ahlu-Sunna Wal-Jamaa is the overall security provider in South Galkayo and has managed to improve security in the area administered by Galmudug State. Compared to other regions in south-central Somalia, the area under the control of Galmudug State has enjoyed relative stability since 2006 and has attracted people displaced by conflict from other regions. While the relationship between the host communities in South Galkayo and the IDPs has



previously been good (mainly due to clan loyalties), the risk of tension is now increasing as the growing number of IDPs puts pressure on the communities' limited resources.

Galkayo is of great strategic importance as it represents one of the few pockets of relative stability in Somalia, from and in which international organisations can operate. Yet most organisations settle in North Galkayo under the Puntland administration, a move that has fuelled a feeling of marginalisation in South Galkayo. DDG is one of the few organisations that have explored the possibility of access in South Galkayo by starting up community safety programmes in two communities there, Dalsan and Alanley, in 2010.

Community safety is a bottom-up approach to stabilisation where the communities themselves have strong ownership of the process. External as well as internal dynamics of crime, armed violence and clan conflict combined with the very limited resources within the communities make stability in South Galkayo very fragile and there is an urgent need for sustainable security solutions. Galmudug State is pursuing statebuilding goals in their region but lacks the capacity and resources to create security and development without external assistance – and is therefore actively seeking partnerships with international organisations. In contrast to al-Shabaab, Ahlu-Sunna Wal-Jamaa does not oppose

international agencies which receive funding from Western governments. This is partly due to the make-up of the NSAG, which is funded on clan structures rather than religious discourse, and partly because Ahlu-Sunna Wal-Jamaa works in alliance with the Transitional Federal Government. DDG is working with Galmudug State to address all aspects of armed violence and bring together members of different communities to identify and develop solutions to their safety and security needs, through development and implementation of a community safety plan. Such community safety projects aim not only to improve the immediate security situation but also to strengthen the target communities' capacity to resist being drawn into conflict and to improve any individual or group behaviour which might contribute to triggering conflict.

#### Community safety

More than 50% of the households in DDG's two target communities report owning at least one firearm, and accidents related to small arms and light weapons (SALW) remain among the highest security concerns in the two communities. DDG's programme involves installing safe storage devices<sup>2</sup> for small arms and light weapons and clearing unexploded ordnance, and by providing education on the risks of mines and training in firearm safety behaviour. Another big security concern in Dalsan and Alanley is communal and clan conflict.

Here DDG seeks to strengthen the communities' capacity to manage conflict and find peaceful settlements to disputes, e.g. through conflict management education. As IDPs are new-comers to the communities, they often become vulnerable when there is conflict; strengthening the relationship between IDPs and the host communities by involving both groups in the community safety process, and thereby creating common ownership, is therefore of high importance.

Crimes of rape, theft, assault and robbery are also of great concern within the two communities. Such crime can not only affect the safety of the population but can also be potentially destabilising – for example, by sparking revenge killings and conflict between clans, families or north/south population.<sup>3</sup> Traditional leaders lack the tools to address these new criminal trends; what is needed is an effective police force that the communities trust to solve crime and settle disputes. Galmudug State has recently trained 325 police officers to be employed in South Galkayo but with 38% of households reporting that they would still go to clan leaders concerning a crime, rather than to the police, the relationship between police and the communities clearly needs to be strengthened. DDG has helped establish community-based policing committees, which function as a link between the two. DDG is also engaged in discussions with Galmudug State to identify other ways of supporting the building of formal security institutions, such as training the police force in human rights principles.

There are many challenges associated with providing capacity building and assistance for a police force that is institutionally anchored within an NSAG rather than a recognised government and this has to be done with certain considerations in mind. In the context of Galmudug State, the main challenges are the lack of capacity within the administration and the difficulty of stepping outside clan structures in order to build independent, accountable state institutions. DDG's decision to engage in partnership with Galmudug State was possible because of the high level of legitimacy

that Galmudug State and Ahlu-Sunna Wal-Jamaa hold within the population, and their willingness to discuss human rights standards and international humanitarian law, a potential that can only be explored through partnership and dialogue.

### **Integrating armed violence reduction and development**

Armed violence is one of the major obstacles to development and therefore development initiatives need to be linked to reducing armed violence. In an attempt to link the two processes, DDG and the Danish Refugee Council (DRC) have developed an integrated approach to Community Safety and Community Driven Recovery and Development. In South Galkayo as well as other places across Somalia, both DDG and DRC are present and, when possible,

work alongside each other to engage communities to take ownership of the process of both improving safety and pursuing development goals.

In the Somali context this integrated approach has been successful, fostering sustainable change in the target communities. With UNDP and JPLG (UN Joint Programme on Local Governance and Decentralised Service Delivery)<sup>4</sup> exploring a similar integrated approach at the district level in Puntland and Somaliland, there seems to be an increasing international recognition that armed violence reduction and development need to go hand in hand.

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1. Bradbury, Mark *State-building, Counterterrorism, and Licensing Humanitarianism in Somalia*, September 2010, Feinstein International Center <http://tinyurl.com/TuftsBradburySept2010Somalia>
2. Device for keeping the weapon locked and stored safely to avoid theft and accidents (see picture opposite).
3. 'Community Safety & Security Analysis and Recommended Actions for Galkayo District, Somali Community Safety Framework, forthcoming 2011 at <http://www.somalipeacebuilding.org> The Somali Community Safety Framework is a partnership of local and international NGOs, UN agencies and academic institutions seeking to advance community security in the Somali regions.
4. UN JPLG for Somalia is a five-year joint programme of ILO, UNCDF, UNDP, UN-HABITAT and UNICEF. The partners in the Joint Programme are the Somalia government institutions, Regional Councils, District Councils, Legislatures, Municipal Associations, international and local NGOs/CSOs, and the private sector. <http://jplg.org>